

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Elmington
other names/site number 072 - 0012

2. Location

street & number 3277 Maidens Road not for publication
city or town Powhatan vicinity Powhatan
state Virginia code VA county Powhatan code 145 Zip 23139

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] Date 12/17/04
Signature of certifying official
Virginia Department of Historic Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

 Date
Signature of commenting or other official
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the
National Register
 See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the National Register
 removed from the National Register
 other (explain):
Signature of Keeper
Date of Action

U. S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Elmington
Powhatan County, VA

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u>2</u> buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<u>0</u>	<u>1</u> structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
<u>1</u>	<u>3</u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Domestic Sub: Single Dwelling

<u></u>	<u></u>
<u></u>	<u></u>
<u></u>	<u></u>
<u></u>	<u></u>
<u></u>	<u></u>
<u></u>	<u></u>

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Domestic Sub: Single Dwelling
Domestic Single Dwelling (caretaker's cottage)
Domestic Shed
Recreation & Culture Swimming Pool

<u></u>	<u></u>
<u></u>	<u></u>
<u></u>	<u></u>

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Stephanie A. T. Jacobe, Assistant Registrar

Organization: Virginia Historical Society date 9/1/04

street & number: P. O. Box 7311 428 North Boulevard telephone 804-342-9679

city or town Richmond state VA zip code 23220

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Mr. and Mrs. Robert Cosby

street & number 3277 Maidens Road telephone 804-598-3864

city or town Powhatan state VA zip code 23139

=====
Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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7. Summary Description:

Elmington is situated about a quarter of a mile off Maidens Road, Route 522, a little more than 5 miles from Powhatan Courthouse and about 7 miles from the James River. The house over looks the rolling hills found on the south side of the river. Elmington was built between 1858 and 1859 by Robert Kelso Dabney, Jr. Dabney, a friend of Philip St. George Cocke at nearby Belmead, wrote to A. J. Davis, on March 31, 1858 asking for his assistance in altering plate 21 in A. J. Downing's book, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, 1850. Over the next four months a series of letters were exchanged between the two men and Davis constructed over a dozen drawings for the project. Dabney was, as he phrased it, "young and my means are not such as to justify building, though it may contemplating, such a large house."¹ Dabney only constructed the east wing of the house at this time. It was his intent to construct the west wing, its tower, and a semi-circular veranda at a later date when his fortunes and family did justify it, but the Civil War intervened. After the war Dabney was bankrupt and Elmington was sold in 1871. The house, as Davis designed it, was never completed.

Architectural Analysis:

Elmington is a two-story, three-bay structure with a full basement. It was constructed of five-course common bond brick that was intended to be stuccoed.² The house has a gable roof with large overhanging bracketed eaves that are indicative of the Italianate style. The roof was originally either wood or slate single but has been replaced in the mid-twentieth century with asphalt shingle. The centrally placed Tuscan portico with bracketed eaves was originally intended by A. J. Davis to be placed at the back of the house at the end of the central hall leading off the tower. But as Robert Dabney decided in late May of 1858 not to build the semi-circular veranda around the front of the house, this smaller porch was moved to the main entrance on the front façade. In the mid to late twentieth century the steps of the porch were replaced and widened. The six-paneled depressed-arch front door opens into the hall that runs perpendicularly along the length of the house on all three stories.

On entering the house the stair is directly in front on the right side running up the inside wall. In Davis' drawings the stair appears against the outside wall. There was some discussion of the position of the stair between Dabney and Davis. In the large presentation drawing of Elmington,

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published in *Architecture of the Old South: Virginia*, a full-size window appears in the midst of the stair but on another working drawing a smaller half window appears in that space. It was decided to move the stair to the inside wall so that the window would not be blocked by the stair.⁸ In his first letter to Davis, Dabney underscores that he wants the interior finish of the house to be very plain. The interior finish, crown and base moldings, at Elmington are done in the Tuscan style. The stair, as well, is very plain with simply turned balustrades and nearly no ornamentation on the stair risers. The windows on the first floor on the north and south elevations are all two-over-four sash windows. On the second story only two-over-two sashes were used. On the west side of the house on the first floor there are two French doors that fill doorways to the never completed addition. In the late nineteenth century ironwork was placed over the lower half of the doors.

The size of the rooms was also a point of discussion between the two men. The rooms were built at 16 x 18 feet but a number of measurements are mentioned in several letters. On the first story the two rooms were used as parlor and chamber or master bedroom, an arrangement that remains today. The chimneypieces in the parlor and chamber are of the same neoclassical design. Similar pieces can be found in Asher Benjamin's pattern books but those at Elmington are not exact copies. There are built-in bookshelves on the south side of the fireplace in the parlor. On the opposite side, on the south side of the chamber, a closet and shelves have been added. Davis' design called for two closets to be in that space. There were changes made to these spaces in the mid-twentieth century. On the north side of the fireplaces there is a connecting door between the two rooms that appears on Davis' plan. The small dressing room built on the east wall of the chamber and at the back of the veranda has now been turned into a master bathroom. One small section of the veranda was built as a small porch leading off the hall behind the stair and in front of the dressing room. That porch was enclosed in the 1970s and today is used as a sunroom.

The two rooms on the second floor match those on the first in size and shape. The interiors of these rooms have not been significantly altered in any way. These rooms also have chimneypieces of a neoclassical design but are less ornate than those on the first story. There are also two closets one for each room on either side of the fireplace. On the second floor in the east room there is one change that does not appear in any of Davis' plans or any of the correspondence between Dabney and Davis. The window on the east wall of the east room was changed into a French door that gives access to the roof of the dressing room. Davis also designed a small storage room at the end of the second floor hall. Today that has been turned into a bathroom. A hatch in the ceiling of the bathroom off

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the second floor hall is the only access to the attic. Davis designed the roof of the east wing to have a pitch of five feet. There was discussion of this between Dabney and Davis as Dabney thought it was too low. The roof was built with simple rafters as shown in Davis' long section with a pitch of eight feet.

The basement of the house again mirrors the other two floors. Davis designed the basement to house the kitchen and dining room, an arrangement that remains today. A small storage room off the dining room has been turned into a bathroom. The kitchen has also been modernized. The major change to the basement in the twentieth century is a window underneath the dressing room has now become a door. The area around the window was dug out and there is a set of steps so that the house can be entered and exited at the back.

There are two non-contributing buildings at the back of the property, a small garden shed and a caretaker's cottage, both constructed in the late twentieth century. A non-contributing structure, an in-ground pool, has also been added to the far east side of the property.

8. Statement of Significance

Elmington is one of only five executed domestic commissions in Virginia by New York Romantic Architect, Alexander Jackson Davis (1803-1892). Robert Kelso Dabney, Jr., friend and neighbor of Philip St. George Cocke of Belmead, built the east wing of a larger Davis design between 1858 and 1859. It was Dabney's intention to build the remaining sections of the house that included an asymmetrical tower and semi-circular veranda at a later date. Davis constructed 13 drawings of the house according to his records. Four of these are details of the east wing. The extensive correspondence between Dabney and Davis demonstrates that all the major changes to the design were made with Davis' input. The drawings were made early in the correspondence between the two men and the letters that follow discussed the changes. Davis never made corrected drawings for the project. He and Dabney decided that the next set of drawing would be made when Dabney was ready to complete the west wing, an event that never took place due to the intervention of the Civil War. Therefore, Elmington as it stands today is a nearly intact design by one of America's most well-known architects, A. J. Davis, and is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C as having high artistic values and being an outstanding example of its type.

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Historical Background

Robert Kelso Dabney, Jr. was the son of Robert Kelso Dabney, Sr. and Lucy Ann Pope of Powhatan County. Robert Sr. and Lucy Pope were married January 24, 1827. They had at least two sons, Robert Jr. and William Pope Dabney. Robert Sr. had served for a time as Sheriff of Powhatan County. Robert Kelso Dabney, Jr. married into the Marye family of Fredericksburg, Virginia and as he wrote Davis in 1858 had a young and growing family. It was through Dabney's friendship with Philip St. George Cocke that he contacted A. J. Davis. Davis had designed and built Cocke's home, Belmead, also in Powhatan County. Philip St. George Cocke promoted Davis whenever he could and can be connected to all of Davis' Virginia commissions.⁴

On March 31, 1858 Robert Kelso Dabney, Jr. of Powhatan, Virginia, wrote Architect A. J. Davis in New York asking for his assistance in designing a new home for his growing family. Dabney, an educated patron who knew what he wanted, stated in his first paragraph to Davis "The house nearest my idea is the Italian Villa which I find in "Downing's Country Houses" Design twenty-first page 285. The Italian style is I think best suited to our southern country and the design before one the one best suited to my wants, my tastes, and my means."⁵ Dabney went on to suggest changes to the plan found in Downing's book and even included a rough sketch of what he had in mind for the east wing on the final page of the letter.⁶ The design in Downing's book was to be inverted horizontally. In his letter to Davis Dabney states, "This will make it necessary to turn the house that we find in Downing's book around. That is to shift the position of the entertaining rooms in relation to the front porch putting them to the left of the entrance. Thus will the semicircular veranda look directly to the splendid sweep of the Goochland Hills clothed with verdure and crowned with residences and the far off Blue Ridge Mountains reposing in the glorious azure barrowed from the distance of an hundred miles."⁷ Dabney also wanted a hall that would run through the entire house. Dabney states, "I want the entrance from the porch to be a hall or passage running entirely through the house so that in summer the southern breezes may pass in a current; the hall thus situated is the place generally selected in this country for sitting in summer."⁸

Davis drew initial plans for the first and second floors on the back of Dabney's March 31st letter next to the pencil sketch that Dabney had sent to him. It was Dabney's intention to only build the east wing and complete the rest of the design at a latter date. Davis first sent Dabney drawings of the full

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design on April 23, 1858 and followed that up with details of the east wing and semi-circular veranda on May 26th.⁹ The correspondence between the two men continued until the beginning of July. Alterations to the design were discussed within this extensive correspondence. Davis informed Dabney that he would not need any more drawings until he was ready to construct the west wing, consequently, no more drawings were made after May of 1858.¹⁰ Dabney, toward the end of the correspondence, was negotiating with an un-named builder and asks Davis for advice with regard to his negotiations. He has Davis provide a detailed specification for him to use as a reference point in negotiating construction prices. The house would have been completed by the end of 1859.

Robert Kelso Dabney was a plantation owner who, before the war, owned 45 slaves. He served in the Confederate Cavalry under his friend Philip St. George Cocke and fought at the First Battle of Bull Run. After the war he was bankrupt and by 1870 had become a professor of metaphysics at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee. His brother William Pope Dabney sold Elmington and 1000 acres of land in 1871 to W. H. Carhart. Elmington remained in the Carhart family until well into the twentieth century.

A. J. Davis sent a letter to Robert Dabney after the Civil War inquiring about his health and that of others Davis knew in Virginia. William Pope Dabney, Robert's brother, answered Davis' letter on May 10, 1871. William Pope Dabney's letter gives us a candid view into the condition of Virginia at the end of Reconstruction. Dabney states, "I have by your letter to my brother R. Dabney. I have determined to reply to your questions as they show in a northern man some sympathy for an almost crushed and ruined people. ... Indeed nearly all our James River owing a few thousand dollars, which one tobacco crop would have paid, are ruined and bankrupt. I would not advise you to visit Virginia at this time. The old hereditary mansions are in the Land (illegible) of owner but nobody is able to buy them but of the overseer class who rent them from the assignee in bankruptcy and work a small patch themselves with their sons - the old planter is gone - the slaves are living in the huts in the pen eking out a miserable half staved condition by petty theft & deplorations. But I fear I bore you with this dreadful tale — I am one of the few who think a good time is yet coming & who statesman chief can make this country endowed so muchly with natural gifts prosper again."¹¹ Robert and William Dabney were lively and engaging correspondents. Elmington, the home of Robert Dabney, is the product of this communication between a highly educated group of men in antebellum Virginia and one of the greatest architects of the nineteenth century, A. J. Davis.

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End Notes

1. Robert K. Dabney to A. J. Davis, June 2, 1858, Metropolitan Museum of Art, A. J. Davis collection, Vol XVIII, 24. 66. 1417, Leaf 138 recto.
2. Robert K. Dabney to A. J. Davis, April 15, 1858, Metropolitan Museum of Art, A. J. Davis collection, Vol XVIII, 24. 66. 1417, Leaf 145 recto.
3. Mills Lane, *Architecture of the Old South: Virginia*, (New York: Abbeyville Press, 1996), 247; Robert K. Dabney to A. J. Davis, July 10, 1858, Metropolitan Museum of Art, A. J. Davis collection, Vol XVIII, 24. 66. 1417, Leaf 143 verso.
4. Charles E. Brownell, Calder Loth, William M. S. Rasmussen, and Richard Guy Wilson. *The Making of Virginia Architecture*. (Richmond: The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1992), 276
5. Robert K. Dabney to A. J. Davis, March 31, 1858, Metropolitan Museum of Art, A. J. Davis collection, Vol XVIII, 24. 66. 1417, Leaf 127 recto.
6. Robert K. Dabney to A. J. Davis, March 31, 1858, Metropolitan Museum of Art, A. J. Davis collection, Vol XVIII, 24. 66. 1417, Leaf 129 verso.
7. Robert K. Dabney to A. J. Davis, March 31, 1858, Metropolitan Museum of Art, A. J. Davis collection, Vol XVIII, 24. 66. 1417, Leaf 127 verso.
8. Robert K. Dabney to A. J. Davis, March 31, 1858, Metropolitan Museum of Art, A. J. Davis collection, Vol XVIII, 24. 66. 1417, Leaf 127 verso.
9. A. J. Davis, April 15, 1858, Metropolitan Museum of Art, A. J. Davis collection, Vol XVIII, 24. 66. 1417, Leaf 133 recto.
10. Robert K. Dabney to A. J. Davis, July 6, 1858, Metropolitan Museum of Art, A. J. Davis collection, Vol XVIII, 24. 66. 1417, Leaf 140 verso.

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11. William Pope Dabney to A. J. Davis, May 10, 1871, Metropolitan Museum of Art, A. J. Davis collection, Vol XVIII, 24. 66. 1417, Leaf 148 recto.

Bibliography

Brownell, Charles E., Calder Loth, William M. S. Rasmussen, and Richard Guy Wilson. *The Making of Virginia Architecture*. Richmond: The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1992

Dalton, Robert E. and John E. Wells. *The Virginia Architects 1835-1955: A Biographical Dictionary*. Richmond: New South Architectural Press, 1997.

Downing, Andrew Jackson. *The Architecture of Country Houses*. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1850

Lane, Mills. *Architecture of the Old South: Virginia*. New York: Abbeyville Press, 1996

Peck, Amelia. *Alexander Jackson Davis, American Architect 1803-1892*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art/Rizzoli, 1992

Verbal Boundary Description

The 3.42 acres of Elmington is identified as parcel #15-31C on the tax parcel maps for Powhatan County and is described in Powhatan County Deed book 156 page 468.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the dwelling house, outbuildings and yard. The Elmington tract has changed continuously in size over the last 150 years from a few thousand to few hundred acres. The present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Robert R. Cosby, own the 3.42 acres of open space immediately surrounding the house site. Consequently, the boundaries described here were chosen based on their relationship to the dwelling.

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Section _Photos_ Page __8__

Note: The following information is common all photographs:

NAME OF PROPERTY: Elmington
LOCATION: Powhatan County, Virginia
NAME OF PHOTOGRAPHER: Stephanie A. T. Jacobe
LOCATION OF NEGATIVES: Virginia Department of Historic Resources

View of the front façade looking north
Photo 1 of 12; Neg. #21742
Date: August 28, 2004

Detail of Tuscan portico
Photo 2 of 12; Neg. #21742
Date: August 28, 2004

Exterior looking southeast
Photo 3 of 12; Neg. #21742
Date: August 28, 2004

View of two non-contributing structures, shed and caretaker's cottage
Photo 4 of 12; Neg. #21742
Date: August 28, 2004

View of basement hall
Photo 5 of 12; Neg. #21743
Date: August 28, 2004

Front façade showing enclosed porch
Photo 6 of 12; Neg. #21741
Date: July 31, 2004

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Italian Villa

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick
roof Shingle
walls Brick
other _____

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☐ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

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Interior view showing chimneypiece in parlor
Photo 7 of 12; Neg. #21740
Date: July 31, 2004

Interior of east room on second floor showing chimneypiece
Photo 8 of 12; Neg. #21739
Date: July 31, 2004

View of staircase first floor hall
Photo 9 of 12; Neg. #21740
Date: July 31, 2004

View of stairway second floor hall
Photo 10 of 12; Neg. #21739
Date: July 31, 2004

View of hall, first floor
Photo 11 of 12; Neg. #21740
Date: July 31, 2004

Staircase looking up to second floor
Photo 12 of 12; Neg. #21740
Date: July 31, 2004



Elmington
Powhatan County,
Virginia

Zone 18
241425 E
4166203 N